

TALES FROM THE SINK

By Frederick Parker-Rhodes

These eight tales were told by the author (a scientist) in the 1950s to his children while they washed up, some were told while bathing. He wrote those that he had invented as best as he remembered them. They may be found more amusing to the adult reading them than the children listening.

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THE CURSING OF PRINCESS POLYPORE

King Fungus was the most methodical man, so when his eldest daughter was born he made quite certain that no one was forgotten in sending round the invitations to her christening party. He had heard tales of what happened to other princesses on account of wicked fairies not getting invited. So he had an absolutely exhaustive list of all supernatural beings drawn up, and had it checked by two accountants before sending off the letters.

When the fairies heard what was going on they were most upset. No forgotten invitations, they said, meant no chances to put curses on the baby, and curses are such fun. So they decided to intervene. They sent a gremlin to get into the postman's bicycle, and made it wobble so much that he fell off, and the letters went all over the road. Three of them fell down a grating and got into a sewer, and got washed down to the sewage farm, and floated round and round until they turned into Activated Manure; and in that form they eventually got into a vegetable marrow that the postman grew in his garden, and made it grow to such an enormous and uneatable size that he won a gold medal from the Giant Vegetable Club.

The lost letters were for three fairies called Fluffbrain, Featherhead and Frump. When they were quite sure they hadn't been invited they straight away set about thinking up suitable curses. Fluffbrain decided to make all the clothes the princess ever put on turn black. Featherhead made her sing so horribly that nobody could bear it. And Frump thought up the worst of all, which was frogs springing up wherever she trod. So King Fungus was very upset indeed when, just as the party was going home, these three wicked fairies appeared and pronounced their curses.

"I thought I'd been so careful," he said.

On the whole the palace staff managed the curses fairly well. The clothes were no problem so long as little Polypore could run about the palace gardens naked; they only mattered when she had to go out, which she seldom did. The singing was coped with by preventing the princess from singing, though it was hard, she was by nature gay and happy. As for the frogs, they worked out a pretty

smooth technique, with large shovels, covered wheelbarrows and incinerators. The real trouble began when Polypore grew to be of marriageable age. The only people who really wanted to marry her, once they knew about the curses, were frog-fanciers. Such people the king thought, were not really suitable. Neither was Princess Polypore much of a frog-fancier-fancier herself.

Poor old Fungus was at his wits end, thinking out how to marry her off. The tradition in his family was to challenge all the neighbouring princes to a competition at doing something impossible. That would have been a good idea, but the old family heirlooms used for this purpose were getting a bit shabby. There was first the Unbendable Bow of Bobendibus; that was definitely too bent to be used again. There was the Unwieldable Sword of Smitizennemis; unfit for service. King Fungus had himself won his bride by quenching the Unquenchable Fire of Flamiquencius. There was still the Unfellable Tree of Tremendus, but it seemed such a pity to cut it down. But in the midst of these perplexities, there emerged an unexpected ray of hope.

There was one prince from a neighbouring kingdom who actually went on wanting to marry Polypore after he knew the worst. Perhaps he peeped through a hole in the palace wall, perhaps not, anyway, the princess was exceedingly beautiful, but it wasn't considered safe for any prospective suitor actually to meet her face to face. However that may be, Prince Agaric was undeterred by curses. He was in fact a very original young man, and a leader of fashion to boot. When he wore his trousers three eighths of an inch longer, so did all the upper classes of the city within a month, and the middle classes within a year, and doubtless the industrious poor would catch up in time. When he wore a square hat, everyone of any consequence had to have a square hat; when he wore a triangular hat all hats had to be triangular. He even tried once, as an experiment, wearing two onions hung on his ears. Sure enough, all the nobility hung onions on their ears, and the stench at royal garden parties was awful. So he had no doubts about his ability to influence people.

Thus it was that he thought up a cunning plan, which, when it was complete, he begged leave to explain to King Fungus. The king was by this time ready to listen to anything, so he said Yes". The prince started by suggesting that the king made a law, forbidding anyone to wear black, on any pretext whatever. Special royal permission could be granted outside the royal family only to the most eminent citizens. He himself would dress in red until, if the king would be so kind, he was publicly given permission to wear the new colour of honour. The king was delighted, and immediately issued the required decree. In a few months it was universally accepted in the country that black was the exclusive colour of royalty. And the fact that Prince Agaric had recently started wearing black was everywhere taken as a sign that his betrothal to Princess Polypore would shortly be announced.

Next, the prince tackled the awful singing. First he had very accurate recordings made of the Princesses voice, by using robust apparatus it proved just possible. Then expert musicians were called in to get used to it, and to compose music in imitation of it. It was indeed the most hideous din you ever heard; but hideous music had been fashionable in those parts before. By assiduously attending the new style concerts the prince was able before long to make all the highbrows in the country confess their preference for the hideous noises that they were called on to admire. It was at this time that the custom began of wearing earplugs, which still distinguishes the inhabitants of that part of the world, as the curious traveller can ascertain for himself any day. It wasn't until the caterwauling phase had passed away and the people had forgotten the origins of the custom, that the earplugs achieved their present foot long proportions and bejewelled magnificence.

The frogs were the biggest trouble, of course. But Prince Agaric was not to be defeated. He spent a large part of his father's revenue setting up a Royal Institute of Batrachiology where the most eminent scientists spent day after day thinking up ways of making good use of frogs. Within a year they had discovered how to make a potent medicine out of frogs livers, reputed to cure almost all diseases; second, a way of making frogspawn into a truly

scrumptious pudding; and thirdly, a method of getting enough electric current from frogs legs (given that these would be available in unlimited quantities) to run a power station. Once this last result had been obtained, the Prince invited Polypore to go on a walking tour. By the time they had come back they enough frogs to generate nearly ten megawatts for half a year. The national economy began to improve from that day, and the frog-productiveness of their Princess was counted as one of their greatest blessings by the people of the land.

So Agaric and Polypore were married with the greatest pomp. The first honours given to eminent citizens on the occasion of the their marriage was the right to wear black being accorded to the scientists who had discovered how useful frogs could be. When their children were born, they made quite sure there would be no trouble from fairies by not inviting anybody to the Christening Parties.

DING AND DONG

Once upon a time a long time ago there were two garbagers who were out of work and fell on hard times, and their names were Ding and Dong. After trying in one town and another to find work for a long time, they at last came to cathedral city where they found work as quarterjacks. Now the job of a quarterjack consists in coming out beside a clock very punctually every quarter of an hour, and striking as many quarters it is since the last hour on a bell. It was one of the first jobs ever to fully automated; and it would have been so in this case, only the orloger who was making the clock was struck by lightning for swearing in church. It wasn't hard work, but very boring. And they only had Saturday evenings off.

However, Ding and Dong were glad enough to turn an honest penny, so they went to work. After some days Ding noticed something. He said to Dong "You see that girl holding the Moon?" and Dong said "Yes." (She was very beautiful, and her job was to turn the round gilded ball representing the moon to show what phase it was at) "Well," said Ding, "she isn't fully automated either, because she winked at me." So after that Dong watched and watched, and sure enough, she winked at him too. From then on Ding and Dong kept score, how often Luna winked at each of them; they did occasionally miss a quarter-hour in consequence, and had a halfpenny off their pay each time, but it did make life a little less dull.

They soon found that at night, when there was no one about to hear, Luna would talk to them, though only in whispers. It turned out that she had the day off whenever it was new moon, because she had nothing in the way of a phase to show. So they could never meet properly unless new moon fell on a Saturday. On average, as you can easily work out, this happens once in seven months; they were lucky enough only to have to wait four months till Saturday came when they would be off duty at the same time as Luna. They planned to go for a walk in the Cathedral close.

Now Luna didn't want to go for a walk with two garbagers very much; so she devised a plan not to have to, without seeming downright rude. First she was nice to Ding and cold to Dong, and then vice versa, until after some time Ding and Dong fell to fighting each other for jealousy. Meanwhile Luna slipped away; presently she saw the figure of a monk walking in the close. He came up to her and said, did she know if there were a cathedral in these parts? She said there was, and if he'd shut his eyes tight she'd take him there by magic. He did that, and she spun him round till he was facing the cathedral, and said "We're here!" He was very impressed, and said he was an orloger who'd heard there was a clock needing finishing. "Oh my father will be glad," said Luna "he's sick and tired of turning the hands round."

Well, next morning, when Ding and Dong turned up, having got tired of fighting, they found ropes up, and notices, such as "Closed for repairs", and "Danger, men at work", and "Swearing prohibited", and "Hands wanted". When Ding and Dong applied for the job, they found it meant the either kind of hands, so they went into the city. Ding soon found a job in North Ward, carrying garbage from North Street and leaving it in South Street. The next day, Dong got work too, in South Ward, carrying garbage from South Street and leaving it in North Street. They might have spent the rest of their lives in this harmless and remunerative occupation, had not the new orloger made friends with Luna. After a time, for all he was a monk, he fell in love with her. At last ---- well, early one morning, as he was going to work, a gargoyle fell on him and he died.

So Ding and Dong and Luna were back again at their old jobs. But they soon noticed Improvements. The chief was a new figure, whose job it was to show how long it was before and after the principle Feasts of the Church. They called her Calendria. Ding was sure she was fully automated; but Dong was not so sure, and one day he made faces at her every quarter of an hour until at last, near sunset, she giggled. So they knew.

At last, they were all very glad when a third orloger turned up. He was Mr Robinson, and had a nice little business in Market

Square, and a wife and family, and all. Why he didn't get the job of making the clock in the first place is anyone's guess. Anyway, he soon had the job done, with everything fully automated and in working order. And being all against Modern Technology doing people out of jobs, he offered to take on Ding and Dong to sell watches for him, which he made. So they did that; and Ding married Luna and Dong married Calendria. Afterwards they went to live in Switzerland, and became known as the Swiss Family Robinson. And that is why Switzerland is famous to this day for making watches.

THE DIAMOND ANKLETS

Once in a far country there was a very rich man called Dhrattatal whose chief trouble was his wife Khipit. One day, as often, he arranged a Hunt. He and his friends and of course Khipit spent all day killing animals. At the cost £225 they purchase in this way over twelve hours of Pleasure. Or so Dhrattatal thought till he got home. Then Khipit came to him in a state of agitation and said “I’ve lost my diamond anklets.”

“Which diamond anklets?” said Dhrattatal, because she had lots of them.

“My best ones”, she cried. “They were worth £492, not counting £717 sentimental value because dear Bhashmi gave them to me.”

“Oh dear, we’ll never find them, we went over miles and miles of country. I’ll give you £492 to buy a new pair.”

“But” wailed Khipit “they won’t be the ones poor Bhashmi gave me.”

“Well, I’ll make it £492 and £717, let me see yess that’s, that’ll be um about yes, £1209.”

“As if it were a matter of mere arithmetic!” Khipit sobbed.

Well, there was nothing for it but Dhrattatal had to organise a search. He sent for his confidential servant Dhuita and said “Organise a search.” So Dhuita bowed, and said “The anklets will be found in six hours.” After six hours he came back to say he’d meant days. After six weeks he reported that he was sorry, but they could not be found anywhere within 25 miles. “If I may advise you Sir, I should consult the hermit Ghoshaima Mahvil; his occult powers are something chronic, by all accounts.” At a loss to know what else to do (Khipit was still whining once a day) Dhrattatal agreed. So he set out, accompanied only by Dhuita. Ghoshaima Mahvil lived, as most hermits do, in a very inaccessible spot, near the top of a high mountain on the other side of a large forest. It took them several days to get there, but Dhrattatal enjoyed every moment of it, because Khipit wasn’t there whining about her anklets. When at last they reached the hermit’s cave Dhrattatal entered, bowed low, and said “Will your holiness grant a boon?”

“Such as what?” said the hermit. Then Dhrattatal explained, and the hermit was most sympathetic and he’d see what he could do. After going into a trance for a couple of hours, he opened his eyes and said “Can you shoot with a bow?”

“Of course I can.” said Dhrattatal.

“Well,” replied the hermit, “take this white arrow, go up to the very top of this mountain, and shoot. Where the arrow falls, either you will find the anklets, or some information to help you in your search.”

Dhrattatal was duly grateful, and took the arrow, and went to the top of the mountain. Dhuitat however trod on the begging bowl which the hermit had stupidly left in the doorway, and felt obliged to leave in it a small purse of gold, which they had brought in case of accidents. When they got to the top, Dhrattatal set the arrow to the bow, and was about to shoot, when he felt himself slewed round by an unseen force. Recognising it immediately as one of the hermit’s Occult Powers at work, he faced in the direction indicated, and let fly. The arrow fell among the trees beneath them. Neither of them could see where it was, but started down the hillside, hoping to come across it. Sure enough, they did. It seemed to be sticking in a tree, but on closer inspection there was an old man sitting under the tree, and the arrow had transfixed his hat. “I beg your pardon” said Dhrattatal, “I think that is my arrow.”

“Ho no it aint” said the old man, “that belongs to that old fraud Ghoshaima Mahvil.” Then Dhrattatal had to explain everything. “Well,” said the old man “you shouldn’t have gone to ’im, ’e’s ’opeless ’e is. Now I know of a real ’oly ’ermit, I do.” Then he told them how to get to this hermit’s cell. It was at the top of an even higher mountain, even further away. Before they set off the old man offered Dhrattatal the arrow, but he politely declined. Had he known that it had the property of striking anybody dumb, he might not have been so hasty.

When they reached the other hermit’s cell they were very tired, but Dhrattatal insisted that they go straight in. Having stated their business, the hermit made no delay, but hung himself up by his

feet from a bracket in the wall and went into a trance. After twenty minutes he said in a hollow voice "Can you shoot?"

"Yes." said Dhrattatal.

"Then take this white arrow, and go to the very top of the mountain and shoot it. Where it lands you find what you are seeking, or at least a useful clue."

"Thank you kindly." said Dhrattatal, and did that.

This time the arrow turned round sharply in the air, and followed after a large stag that was bounding over the rocks. When it caught him up, it balanced itself neatly between his antlers, and the stag ran on.

"Oh bother," said Dhrattatal, "we'll have to run."

"You shall run, and I shall watch to see that you go the right way."

Said Dhrattatal. So Dhuita set off. He immediately tripped over, and noticed that inexplicably the hermit's two begging bowls had got in his way. Having filled them (both, to make sure), he set off after the stag. The stag however ran in a circle to where Dhrattatal was sitting, and nudged him with his antlers till he got up, and then chased him on and on for miles and miles till at long last they came to yet another hermit's cell. Only then did Dhrattatal look round and observe that Dhuita had managed to get on the stag's back. He would have said a piece of his mind if the hermit hadn't been listening. Instead he bowed low and stated once more his request.

The hermit promptly lay down on a bed of nails and closed his eyes.

"What's the betting" said Dhuita in a hoarse whisper, "that he says 'take this white arrow..'? the hermit opened one eye and said "I see you are a high Initiate of our Order"

"Oh no, don't mention it." said Dhuita.

"Ah, but I must" said the hermit "not to do so would be a discourtesy having the most malign consequences. Reverend Sir, I cannot immediately divine the deep subtlety which has prevented you from offering the White Arrow yourself to your client, but since you deign to make the request to me, I reverently grant it." With which speech he passed over another white arrow.

Dhrattatal took it, climbed the hill, and wearily shot it once more. This time it sped forward horizontally without any

slackening of speed or loss of height, until it rapidly disappeared in the distance. “That’s torn it!” said Dhuita “Try again with the one the stag had.”

“That would never do, I’m sure.” said Dhrattata, though he didn’t really know why. As a matter of fact, had he known that that arrow had the power of turning the first woman it touched into a pillar of salt, he might have thought differently. Anyway, they left it, and went off vaguely in the direction the arrow had gone, and presently being overtaken by darkness, they lay down to sleep.

When they awoke, they were surprised to find a large eagle perching with one foot on each of their heads. Looking closer, they saw that the bird had in its beak an arrow, a white one. A still closer look showed that the arrow had fixed to it a large piece of paper. This proved to be a map of the vicinity, with a large X at the summit of a particularly high and steep mountain. “A clue,” said Dhrattata, “let’s go and see what’s there.”

“I know perfectly well what we’ll find,” said Dhuita “another beastly old hermit in a nasty dirty cell.”

“Don’t be disrespectful to holy men.” said Dhrattata, who didn’t feel any less so himself. Well, they went on and on and up and up and about midday arrived at the top of the mountain. Sure enough there was wooden hut. Dhrattata knocked at the door.

“What do you want?” said a testy voice.

“Please can you lend me a white arrow?” said Dhrattata.

Immediately a white arrow was thrown out of the door. Dhrattata picked it up and didn’t even bother to go the very top of the mountain (they were almost there anyway). He shot it, and to his immense surprise it went straight up in the air. The two of them watched for several minutes as it came down again, at the very last moment stepping smartly aside as it fell at their feet.

“Cor, you don’t mean this old blighter’s got the anklets?” said Dhuita.

“It’s worth asking” said Dhrattata. So they knocked again at the door. In response to their question, the hermit said “The true meaning of this is that you ought to become my disciple and give up being a rich man and live here forever.”

Dhuita! thought this a thoroughly stupid idea. But actually Dhrattata! was more than a little inclined to accept the invitation. "The trouble is" he said "that wife of mine is sure to find me eventually and then I'll be done for."

"Don't worry about that" said the hermit, "I'm quite holy enough to deal with the likes of her." So Dhrattata! sent Dhuita! back home to tell Khipit he had been trampled on by an elephant and was no good any more, then turned immediately to start meditating on the nature of Truth. In this exercise he made such excellent progress that he almost began to worry about the lie that he had told Dhuita! to tell Khipit.

But he needn't have worried. She wasn't deceived. She found out, as he knew she would, where he was, and eventually one day a commotion was heard outside the mountain retreat. On looking out Dhrattata! was aghast to see what he had so long dreaded.

"Leave this to me" said the hermit, who calmly went out to meet them.

"Tell me" said Khipit, "have you my husband in there?"

"The true meaning of what you say" said the hermit "I take to be, 'Have you my diamond anklets in there?' Well I have, and here they are, with love and kisses from dear Bhashmi." Khipit was tremendously glad to have them back again, and immediately put half a crown in the hermit's begging bowl. She was so glad to have the anklets back that she asked no further questions about Dhrattata!, but went away and never came back.

Afterwards, Dhrattata! became so immensely holy that when the old hermit died he took over the cell and nobody ever noticed the difference. So he acquired the reputation of having lived to be 153 years old. And all that time he never had to worry about having Pleasure.

NODDY, FLOPPY, AND MELT

Once upon a time there were three brothers, called Noddy, Floppy, and Melt. Noddy had a big head which he couldn't hold very still, but otherwise he was all right. He had a car called Brumph, which he kept in a little garage and wouldn't let anybody else drive.

Floppy often wanted to drive Noddy's car. Noddy and Melt always told him he couldn't possibly drive cars, because he was too floppy. He couldn't really stand up by himself, but he was quite all right if propped, and of course, he said, he would be propped very nicely once he was actually in the car. But Noddy said "No" and that was that.

At least, he thought it was that. But what it was was this, which you shall hear. Floppy went that evening to Melt's room and said "Help me to make a plot." Melt lived in a bucket, but he was very good at plots. He said "Why don't you go at dead of night when Noddy's asleep, and creep into the garage and drive Brumph away?" Floppy knew he was rather liable to fall over, especially at night, and might make a noise and wake Noddy. But he had no doubt at all that once he was in the car he would be able to drive it easily. So he said he would, but he wouldn't wait until the actual dead of night, but start as soon as it was dark and go very slowly, so as not to fall and make a noise.

Well, things went all right. Floppy did fall over twice, but he was too soft to make much noise if he didn't knock over anything, and luckily he didn't. So he got to the garage, and crept in, and managed to prop himself up in the seat in Brumph. Then he started to press the knobs. He found one marked start, but it didn't seem to work. Only after a rather long time did he discover another knob called Ign which made a little red light come on, and then Start worked. There was a great Brumph, and the garage fell down all over him, and there he was, driving along the road in the pitch dark. That was because Noddy always left Brumph in gear, in case of accidents. This wasn't one of the accidents he had in mind.

When Noddy heard the noise he woke up and said to himself “Ha, someone has stolen Brumph.” Then he went along to Floppy’s bedroom and said “Hi, Floppy.” No answer. “Ha!” said Noddy to himself and went along to Melt’s room and said “Hi, Melt.” “Glub” replied Melt. “Where had Floppy gone to?” asked Noddy. Melt said he had gone away in Brumph. “Oh dear,” said Noddy, “I shall never find him now, it’s much too dark for looking for people and Brumph goes very fast.” But Melt said “Maybe fast, but not very far, not when Floppy is what-he-calls driving.” So Noddy said “Do you know which way he went?” And Melt said he did, and if Noddy would carry him in his bucket he was sure he’d soon be found.

So Noddy did that, and he and Melt went off down the road, and they hadn’t got further than the first turning, when they saw, by the light of the torch they carried, a sorry sight. What had happened was that Floppy did not know about steering. He knew about lights, because he had found the light switches when he was looking for the starter. But steering he thought was obvious, and it turned out that it was only obvious when you didn’t actually do it in the dark in a hurry when you weren’t expecting it. So he had run into a tree and poor Brumph was a good deal bent. So was Floppy, but he was built to bend.

“You wicked brother,” said Noddy, “Stealing my car.” “I didn’t mean to.” said Floppy. “Serves you right and I wish you were hurt more.” Said Noddy, who wouldn’t have said that if he hadn’t been cross about Brumph being bent. “Never mind,” said Melt, “I’ll put that right for you.” Now Melt wasn’t much good at a lot of things but he could flow, and permeate, and expand, better than anyone. So Noddy poured him out of bucket into Brumph, and he flowed under the floorboards and into all the bent parts, and expanded till they were all straightened out beautifully. Then Noddy put the bucket underneath and he flowed into that. “Now,” said Melt, “seeing that I’ve saved your car for you, won’t you let me drive home?” “Don’t be silly,” said Noddy, “you couldn’t possibly.” “No worse than that Floppy, anyway.” said Melt.

After a bit of argument Melt persuaded Noddy to put his bucket in the driving seat, and with Noddy to hold the steering wheel and work the pedals he could drive quite well. When they got back, there was Brumph's garage, all of a heap. Actually, it had been made of matchboxes, and most of them were still all right, but several were squashed beyond repair. So they made Floppy get new ones (and he wasn't allowed to use any of them till all the matches had been used up.) Then he had to build up the garage again. It took him weeks and weeks, and he would have burned his fingers all off, only he hadn't any fingers.

After that, Floppy never tried to drive Brumph again. But sometimes Noddy would take him out for a drive with Melt. Eventually Floppy bought himself glider which was much better than a car. But it was Melt that kept the family, by driving waterwheels for millers during the dry season.

THE NINETY TWO ROBBERS

Once upon a time there was a band of robbers, who lived in a strongly fortified castle, and preyed on the surrounding inhabitants. There were ninety two of them, and their names were Hydrogen, Helium, Lithium, . . . but that's enough to show what a desperate and atrocious set of people they were. Anyway, the local inhabitants hated having them, so they got up a petition and sent it to the King.

The King was called Laz, and he was a very lazy man. His motto was 'Never do anything that anyone else will do for you' and if you are a king, there is almost always someone to do it for you. So when the petition came, and King Laz had been woken up by his Awakener, he listened to half of it and then said "Tition granted – ask Biz." Which was what he always said to petitioners. Now Biz was the name of the Prime Minister, and he was quite the opposite of Laz. His motto was 'Never let anyone do anything you can do yourself'. He would have been the busiest man ever, if it hadn't been for Muz, the Lord High Upholder of Custom. Muz had a great book called 'Things Done and Not Done, and Who Mustn't Do Them'.

When Biz heard of the petition he was cock-a-hoop with busyness. He started collecting guns and bombs and truncheons and a policeman's whistle, and was just thinking about Transport when Muz said that never since the records began had robbers been arrested by the Prime Minister in person. "Never?" said Biz. "Not once" said Muz. "Bother," said Biz, "Who's got to go then?" "That" said Muz "is the office of the High Constable. And there are seven High Constables, and the Lord High Keeper of the Address Book knows who they are."

So they went and asked the Keeper of the Address Book, and he looked them up and wrote them all a long letter explaining things. After nearly a year it turned out that all the High Constables were dead. Most of them had been for years. "There's nothing for it," said Muz "we must ask the King to appoint new ones. So they

went to the Royal Siesta room and waited respectfully for His Majesty to wake up. When this happened they said to him "Please appoint seven High Constables." "Appoint?" said the King. "Yes," they said, "You must give us the names of seven new High Constables," "Seven?" said Laz, "Oh, I could never think of seven names. I'll think of one name, and you must find seven people to fit it." So the King went thought and thought, and when he woke up again he said, "Zyz." "What?" said Muz. "The name of the High Constables." Said the King. And that was that.

Zyz was a very uncommon name. It took them a very long time to find anybody called that at all. But as luck would have it there was, in a remote province of the kingdom, an old widow woman called Zyz who had seven sons. So the Lord High Keeper of the address Book was sent to her, and presented the seven sons with their insignia; each had a green silk gag and small gold-plated truncheon. He also explained that each High Constable might enrol not more than thirteen Low Constables, and could claim unlimited Expenses from the Treasury. Then he left them to it.

The seven Zyz sons held a conference and decided that, as their mother would never let them go out except one at a time in case they were carried off by robbers, they would take the task one by one. The first to go was the youngest, called Gaz. Gaz was wonderfully brave but a bit soft. He decided not to use the unworthy expedient of appointing Low Constables, but to go in person to the robbers' castle, and march them off to the capital. He did that, but he never came back. After a year had gone by, the Zyz sons called another family council, and decided that the next youngest should go. He was called Fiz, and was very keen of magic. He belonged to the Amalgamated Society of Wizards and Warlocks, and he got from them the address of a reliable wizard who lived in the town nearest the robbers' castle. This obliging gentleman provided a very powerful Coming Spell, and Fiz provided thirteen Black Marias, and enrolled thirteen Low Constables to drive them, and lined them up in the town square. Then the wizard pronounced the spell, and sure enough the Robbers Came. All ninety two of them. They got into the black marias and

drove off. Just as the last one was leaving Fiz looked in to see that it was all right, and it wasn't. They had killed the Low Constables, and were driving the black marias themselves; and they drove back to their castle and took Fiz with them. The trouble was, the spell didn't say anything but Come.

After another year it was obvious that Fiz had failed, so they sent the next brother, Ez. Ez decided to set them a trap. So he went to the mayor of the town by the castle, and borrowed all the gold plate, and organised an immense picnic. His idea was that a picnic with all that gold would tempt the robbers to come out, and then his Low Constables, all heavily armed with the latest and most complicated weapons, would jump out from a place of concealment and arrest them. But they never came. He had the picnics in all sorts of wild and desolate places, as well as in the town streets and once at the top of a tree, but it was no good. At the seventeenth picnic Ez noticed that the gold plates didn't look quite as good as new, and truth dawned on him, that they weren't gold at all. Also of course the robbers must have known that, and so they must have tried to steal them before. Eaten up with curiosity to know whether his reasoning was correct, Ez crept up one night to the castle, and was never seen again.

The next brother to go was Dez. He was sure he knew why the other brothers had failed. They hadn't trained their Low Constables properly. Dez therefore recruited fourteen Low Constables (so as to have one over in case of accidents) and started training them in all known methods of combat. They learned the art of fencing, and shooting, and Jiu Jitsu, and even took a course in Foul Language. Then they set an ambush round the castle gates and waited for the robbers to emerge. The plan went very well, and ninety one of the robbers had been arrested when, having lost count, (luckily for the prisoners in the castle, who would otherwise have starved) they marched them off in handcuffs, just as they had learnt in the book. They were brought before the Lord High Justice, and they hired a very learned lawyer to defend them. To Dez's surprise, when they were asked whether they had committed their numerous and atrocious robberies they said yes, and more. And when the

Lord High Justice said “Have you anything further to say in extenuation of your horrible crimes?” Their lawyer said “Yes, the prisoners were illegally arrested. Because there were fourteen Low Constables and the Law only allows thirteen, so at least one-fourteenth of the prisoners must have been arrested illegally, and as we can't tell which they were, you will have to let them all off.” “A nice point, a very nice point said the Lord High Justice, and forthwith discharged them. Moreover he ordered them to put Dez in prison for flouting the Law.

Next it was the turn of the third brother, Cez. He was a very clever young man and thought a great deal, and he had invented a clever plan. He intended to lay siege to the castle and starve them out. For this purpose he needed all the thirteen Low Constables, but remembering the sad fate of brother Dez he wouldn't have so much as half of one over the ration. He argued that for maintaining a siege the great danger was Softness of Heart, so he took great care that only hard-hearted and villainous characters should be Low Constables, and before long he had assembled the thirteen most undesirable types you ever saw. Then he marched them up to the castle. But instead of making a cordon round it they marched boldly in, and all too late Cez discovered that his Low Constables were none other than the robbers themselves.

There were only two brothers now left, and Bez took the next turn. He was a simple soul and relied entirely on Strength. He had never yet been beaten in wrestling, so he thought that he would have no difficulty with a mere 92 robbers. Sure enough, he went up to the castle and challenged all comers; and one by one they had to acknowledge themselves beaten, all except the last who was also the fiercest and heaviest; by the time Bez reached him he was feeling tired, so perhaps it wasn't surprising that Bez was bound hand and foot and thrown into the dungeon.

Last of all there was the eldest, Az. He couldn't think what to do, until one day he read in the papers that one of the robbers was ill. All the most skilful physicians of the land were called in, and eighteen brilliant surgeons; but though they gave him all medicines they knew the names of, and cut off every part of him that looked at

all out of the ordinary, it was no use. He died. They buried him in a magnificent tomb outside the castle gates. Then Az acted. He dressed up in the most bloodthirsty clothes he could think of, and set off for the castle, having first engaged no less than 91 Low Constables, reckoning, correctly enough, that seven thirteens would come to just that. Concealing the Low Constables about the grounds, he went up to the castle gate and rang the bell.

A small robber opened it and Az said “I hear there is a vacancy for a desperate criminal here.”

“Ah, yes” replied the robber, snivelling slightly, “poor brother Nitrogen has received his Promotion. Come in.” So Az came in, and satisfied the robbers of his unexceptionable wickedness by telling them a whopping lie and recounting his life of crime simultaneously. So they took him on. They gave him the most menial task, because he was the junior robber, and that was guarding the prisoners. There were six prisoners, all called Zyz. It didn’t take them long between them to signal to the Low Constables to attack, and meanwhile raised the cry of ‘Fire’ within. In the confusion each Low Constable grabbed his man, and the seven brothers emerged from confinement and each formally commissioned thirteen Low Constables.

This time there was no legal trouble. The robbers were found Exceptionally Guilty and condemned to death. When the question of rewards was raised, Muz suggested that Laz, despite a perfectly good queen, had no children – I mentioned he was a very lazy man – the best thing would be to adopt Az as his heir. So he did. And they all lived happily ever afterwards, so far as this story goes.

PERVY AND THE TOWER

Pervy was ten, and ten years before his father had been carried off by robbers. That accounted for why he had no brothers or sisters; it also accounts for his being the Apple of his Mother's Eye. This needs accounting for, for Pervy was both queer and naughty.

Near where he lived there was a high Tower, called King Arthur's Tower. It was built of brick, and had 1851 carved over the door, and the local people believed that King Arthur had used it as a vantage point in his wars against the Saxons; for which indeed, it was most suitable. Learned Historians used to pooh-pooh the idea, but as you know they will pooh-pooh anything, so we needn't take any notice of them. Pervy had often wanted to climb to the top of this tower, but his Mother wouldn't let him, because she was afraid he would fall off the top. In fact her chief thought about Pervy was "If anything should happen to him." Actually Anything never did happen to him, though lots of other things did, as you shall hear.

One day Pervy said to his Mother, "Please, I want to go up King Arthur's Tower."

"No" said his Mother

"But," said Pervy "I want to pretend to be King Arthur fighting the Saxons." Now Pervy's Mother was a romantic type, especially about Pervy, and had but to think of Pervy as a second King Arthur, saving his countrymen once again from the dreadful Saxons, to go all starry-eyed and say "Very well, but whatever you do don't go to the very top." As if that wasn't just why he was going anyway. So she gave him a bag of applecumjockabies and let him go. All the same, she was anxious about him, so she thought she'd stroll over to the Post Office, which was near the tower, to buy a stamp and tell them to keep a look out. And she went by Jarvis's farm just to pass the time of day. And she should have rung up the Grand Hotel, only she couldn't remember the number. As you shall see, it was lucky she did these things.

Meanwhile Pervy set off and soon reached the tower. He looked up at the projecting parapet all round the top, and imagined himself King Arthur riding round it on his high horse, accompanied by one or two knights, the sun gleaming on their armour, and the Saxons skulking below in their Castle (now the Grand Hotel.) Soon, he thought, I'll be doing that. So he started up. He knew the tower had a spiral staircase with 404 steps; but he didn't know what a big number 404 was. When he had gone up 72 steps he rested and ate an applecumjockaby. When he passed 101 he thought "Only a quarter of the way." He had a good head for figures. By the time he eventually got to the top he had rested seven times and finished all his applecumjockabies, and didn't feel as much like Arthur as he had at the bottom. However, he rested some more, and then opened the door and went out onto the parapet, like his Mother had said he wasn't to, which was naughty.

He walked all round the parapet, which was about four feet high, so he could not very easily fall over, and thought to himself, "I am King Arthur, and I am planning an attack on those Saxons down there." He was nearly right too. However, it occurred to him that the reason King Arthur would have climbed the tower would be to get best possible view of the Saxons, and it wasn't worth spoiling the ship for a haporth of tar, so why not climb up the parapet? This he did; what's more, he leant over, in case there should be any Saxons immediately below setting fire to the tower. Now if hadn't been the Apple of his Mother's Eye he would have been allowed to learn in a more convenient place what happens when you lean over when on top of a wall. If you do this, he now discovered, in a very short time you begin to fall towards the ground. As I said, he had a good for figures, and so he quickly figured out that, at his present velocity (he hadn't yet done Acceleration) he would get down quicker than he had got up.

Fortunately he had chosen the side of the tower nearest the houses to fall from. Otherwise it is very likely that the people wouldn't have seen him so soon, as the whole thickness of the tower would have been between them and him. Probably the first to notice what was happening was Miss Flimsy at the Grand Hotel.

She looked out of the window in great surprise, and said to Sprocket the Chambermaid "I do believe I can see a boy beginning to fall from the tower." God gracious, said Sprocket, I'd better call for Mr Snodgrass. Mr Snodgrass was the hotel handyman, and had a great reputation for being good at emergencies. So she ran through the corridors looking in room after room, till at last she found Mr Snodgrass. When she had explained the situation to him, he took action at once. He went off to the garage to fetch a ladder. When he'd got it, it occurred to him that he didn't quite know what he was going to do with it, but he took it along all the same, thinking that it was better than nothing anyway.

Meanwhile, old Mr Higginbottom at the Post Office also saw the falling boy. He realised at once what had to be done, but he was too fat himself; so his mind flew to his son Gus, who was young and active. Unluckily, as he immediately remembered Gus was in Ghana teaching Grammar. So his mind flew to his son Charles; but he was in China studying China. Then his mind flew to his son Nat, though he knew perfectly well that he was in Norway looking for Lemmings. So in the end he had to think, though it pained him, of his daughter Daisy, who was right there beside him. "Hurry," he said, "there isn't a moment to lose." "Why?" said Daisy. Who wasn't very bright. He explained to her, for he was a patient man, the awful thing that might happen if the boy were to reach the ground when there was no one there to catch him. He carefully didn't explain what would happen to anyone who was directly underneath him. He didn't care Daisy very much.

Daisy dashed off, keen to be the first at the scene. As she went, she came up with Crabtree and Vobster, two men from Jarvis's farm, who had also seen Pervy in the air. Before long they arrived at the foot of the tower, with Pervy descending rapidly towards them. There they met Mr Snodgrass, and a young woman called Peggy Pimpleshank who happened to be passing. It was only then that the important question. How should they try to save the falling boy, really occurred to them in earnest. Mr Snodgrass thought they could sort of use the ladder as a seesaw, but the scheme broke down under Miss Pimpleshank's questioning. She

however said that what they needed was a blanket. "What use would that be?" asked Vobster. "Each of us," replied Peggy, "would hold a corner of it, and he would fall into it."

"Of course, I see," said Vobster.

"That's mighty silly of you," said Crabtree "cos did you ever see a blanket with five corners?" Vobster would have acknowledged himself in the wrong, if Mr Snodgrass hadn't pointed out that one of them could stand aside and even offered to do this himself.

"However," he said "I very much doubt whether there is still time for us to go and fetch a blanket, so that's no use." As it happened, however, Daisy was wearing a sari which her Uncle Ivan had brought back from India, where he had been instituting Insurance, and she offered to lend them that.

So Crabtree held the heel-point of one of her shoes in one hand, and Vobster held the top of her head in his hand, and Mr Snodgrass pulled the end of the sari and running quickly backwards began to unwrap her. It was 33 feet long and 3 feet wide, but it was better than nothing; better even than the ladder, as Mr Snodgrass admitted. When they realised that Daisy was going to be left quite naked, Crabtree and Vobster were overcome with embarrassment, but luckily it didn't matter because being the shape it was the sari only needed two people to hold it. But it did need them nearer than 33 feet apart, which was the distance between Daisy and Mr Snodgrass. Peggy Pimpleshank tried to point this out, but Mr Snodgrass couldn't see it. So she took a piece of chalk out of her handbag and began to draw a diagram on the wall of the tower.

"Begging your pardon, Miss" said Crabtree, "but how long is this explanation likely to take? If I might make so bold, I would suggest that Mr Snodgrass should accept what the lady says as quick as maybe." Mr Snodgrass advanced a pace, but said "The longer the slacker, the slacker the bouncier, the bouncier the better. So Peggy had to go on with her explanations. It takes along time to walk 33 feet, if you have to be convinced by mathematics of the need for each step; and takes a much shorter time to fall the same distance which was about all that was left of Pervy's downward journey. Luckily Mr Snodgrass just thought of a purely non-

mathematical reason why he should go as near as possible to Daisy, so that by the time that Pervy reached them he was met with a mere ten feet of reasonably tightly held sari.

During this time Pervy had been very interested in the proceedings below. He had at first expected that they would climb up the ladder and somehow slow him up on the way down. Then he realised that the long thing was meant to catch him in. he thought it very kind of them to take so much trouble, and busied himself with composing a little speech to say so, because his Mother always said that the least one can do is to Thank people. When he landed on the sari he bounced up again several feet, and in all he bounced three times before coming to rest. He then stepped down, and said “Thank you very much, kind people, my Mother will be most grateful to you. If I hadn’t eaten all my applecumjockabies I would give you each one, but as I have, I can only thnka you.”

So he went home to his Mother who said “What did I tell you?” but she was so glad he was safe she didn’t answer the question very fully. And Pervy never leant over the top of the parapet of King Arthur’s Tower again, though he often went up there. Because his Mother knew that he had learnt his lesson. As for all the other people, they were a bit disappointed that ot was only Pervy they had rescued, because he was always getting into trouble. However, they consoled themselves with the thought that if it hadn’t been him it would probably have been someone bigger, who would have fallen faster, and they wouldn’t have been in time. Peggy Pimpleshank never managed to convince them how wrong they were.

THE ANTIPODEANS

In the bar of the Pig and Poke, the Tripper had just finished a long and dull account of his day in Ostend. "What I always say," he said, saying it, "Is that travel broadens the mind."

"Ah," put in the Traveller, "it does indeed: and further you travel, the broader your mind gets. There are things in distant regions which the inhabitants of this country would never believe, even if our friend here told them."

"How far have you travelled, may I ask?"

"I've been as far from here as anyone can get. Why, I've visited the Antipodes. Men of science, whom I've consulted, tell me that the Antipodes are the remotest place on this earth. It has been worked out by mathematicians – not that I understand such things myself, mind you – that if you go on travelling after you have reached there, you are really on the way home. Not that I'd trust such theories myself, mind you: I came home the straight way, same as I went."

"In that case," said the Tripper, "you must have the broadest possible mind. I'm sure I'd be interested to know what things are like in the Antipodes."

"Well, I warn you, you won't believe me." Replied the Traveller "I've tried it on lots of people, and I'm afraid their minds aren't broad enough to understand what goes on so far away. But if you'll listen I'll tell you what I can."

We waited in a respectful silence for the broadminded one to proceed. "The first thing people find it hard to believe," he began "is that the folk there are differently formed from us. The most astonishing thing is, that they have their faces at the back of their heads."

"Impossible!" said the Tripper, "why, even the Belgians have their faces at the front."

"It's the truth I'm telling, and didn't I say you wouldn't believe me? Now that's only the beginning; for those Antipodeans have their legs turned round the wrong way, too. Of course this

deformity obliges them to walk backwards. It is even said that their private parts at the back.”

“What an extraordinary thing: a whole nation of people back-to-front. How do they manage to live then?”

“Oh, they manage. Of course they have their life arranged to suit their conditions in all sorts of ways. In the towns the streets for instance all run the opposite way to what they would over here; and their houses have their back doors at the front and their front doors at the back. And so forth. Once you get used to it it’s no harder, for example, than driving on the wrong side of the road.”

“Ah” said the Tripper “I see what you mean. I’ve noticed that myself, foreigners drive the wrong side of the road. Of course, for them it’s the right side (perhaps they have their eyes on the opposite sides from ours) but it’s surprising how one gets used to it.”

“But this business of walking backwards isn’t the only queer thing about the Antipodeans: not the most talked of either. There’s something even odder, which I wouldn’t have believed if I hadn’t been there and seen it done.”

“What’s that?” the Tripper asked.

“This is nothing to do with the people themselves: it’s a fact of Nature. In that country, the sky is below you, as it might be this floor here, and the ground is up above, like the ceiling.”

“It may be that Ostend isn’t far away enough to broaden my mind, but I really can’t believe that,” replied the Tripper, “it’s obvious that it it was as you say, the people would fall off into space, and if you’d ever been there as you say, you’d have fallen off too, and we can all see that you haven’t.”

“Now I’m afraid you’re showing that you have no knowledge of science.” Said the Traveller. “Not that I understand these things myself, but mathematicians have proved, by mathematics (and you can’t get round mathematics you know, not if you understand it) that at the Antipodes the force of gravity works upwards instead of downwards. So it turns out to be a wonderful arrangement of providence that the earth and sky are arranged there as I said; for if it weren’t so, then indeed all the people would fall

off, because they'd be pulled upwards by gravity, just as surely as we're pulled downwards here."

"I see," said the Tripper put in in a puzzled sort of way, "at least I think I see, that if gravity were turned round as you say, the people wouldn't fall downwards into the sky. But I must be very strange to visit a country where everyone walks backwards and upsidedown. Surely it takes you long time to get used to that."

"Well, when I was on my way there, and I was told about all this, naturally I didn't believe any more than you did. But when I got there, I found out a very extraordinary thing, which no one had explained to me. And the effect of this was to make it much easier than you might think."

"What thing was that? The Tripper asked.

"It has to do with the way we stand up. Mostly one never thinks about how one stands up, one just does it. But that's just one of the ways travel broadens the mind, as you so wisely said just now, when one gets into a queer situation, an unprecedented environment, one just has to think about things one has never thought about before."

"How do we stand up then?"

"I'll try to explain. You see, we don't, as you might think, set about it by poking our heads up and keeping our feet down, though, as a matter of fact if we did it would work all right in this country – and for that matter in Belgium too. What we actually do, quite instinctively, is to get into a position where the force of gravity presses the weight of the body onto the feet. You see how wonderfully we are adapted to live in all parts of the earth; this method of standing up works just as well in the Antipodes as here, but the other way, head up feet down, would work here but would get people standing on the heads in the Antipodes."

"So all you have to do is to trust to your instincts and not to think about "up" and "down", and a traveller from her can manage all right, even over there?"

"Precisely so; it takes far less trouble to get used to the situation than one would think. Actually, I was quite disappointed to find how ordinary things seemed."

“Well, you’ve certainly told us an astonishing thing,” said the Tripper, “and even persuaded us a little to believe it. I certainly never saw anything like that when I went to Ostend. I should very much like, one day, to have the opportunity of visiting the Antipodes to see it for myself.”

“You just might,” said the Traveller, “be a little disappointed.”

After a while, the Tripper suddenly said “Ah! I see it all, I see it all! If the people are all back-to-front and upside-down, then everything would be exactly the same as it is here. Ha, ha, ha, nothing extraordinary at all! Lucky thing I’ve travelled too, or I’d never have seen through it! Very clever, very clever indeed. ”

THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN

Once upon a time there was a wicked man called Corvo. He was tall and handsome with black hair and black eyes and black moustache and a black heart. If you looked him straight in the eyes he would look away, but in all other respects he was perfectly normal. He had a cousin, a little younger, called Gobbo. This Gobbo was a virtuous and gentle fellow, but not much to look at; he had a receding chin and stick out ears and buck teeth, and his knees knocked together as he walked. If you looked Gobbo straight in the eyes he would stare back at you, for hours on end if need be. In this way people knew that he was honest, and most of them I fear took advantage of his honesty from time to time. But none did this as often as Corvo did.

One day Gobbo said about his mother “I can't stand Corvo any longer”. His mother replied “Don't be rude to your relations”. So Gobbo knew that the time had come to leave home and seek his fortune. He hadn't got much education, or much brains come to that, so he thought he'd better start at the bottom, and he got himself a job as a scullion with a certain Baron Brazenose who lived nearby.

He was quite happy washing the dishes and carting coals, when he wasn't beaten. He was beaten rather often, partly because he was rather stupid and the Major Domo was rather strict, but partly for Another Reason. For Gobbo often found that if ever there were apples missing, apples would be found under his mattress; if ever there was a shortage of oatmeal, there would be a little porridge in the bottom of his porringer; and so on. After a while it began to seem to him cousin Corvo might have a hand in it. So one night he took a bottle of wine which ought to have gone up to the Baron's study, and put it on a high shelf. Then he waited, keeping awake on his palliasse by sticking pins in his leg, till the small hours of the morning. Sure enough a cloaked figure appeared, carrying a bottle. The figure tiptoed over to Gobbo's bed and stooped down. “Thief!” screamed Gobbo. All the scullions woke up, and the head scullion (who was allowed to take firearms to bed if he only used

blank shot) fired three shots at the assailant. Sure enough, it was Corvo.

The next morning he was brought before the Baron, who accused him of burglary, gave evidence against him, sentenced him to year in prison, and promoted Gobbo to be a senior scullion. Had the Baron known whom he was dealing with he might have thought of something more original than prison; for Corvo found it an easy matter to bribe the gaoler with a forged cheque and effected his escape without the slightest trouble. The wicked man then shaved off his moustache and changed his name, and was at his vile tricks once more.

Shortly after that the Assistant Major Domo, an excellent fellow by the name of Mugscuttle, fell ill all of a sudden and died. The doctor who attended him was at the last minute prevented attending the inquest too, and the doctor who came instead said he had died of Schicklgruebers Disease. When Gobbo heard that, he went straight to the Baron's library and looked in the Medical Encyclopaedia he had seen there; Schicklgrueber was not mentioned. That made Gobbo suspicious, but he had no evidence yet to prove what he suspected.

The new Assitant Major Domo was called Mr Splendido. He was a tall dark man, cleanshaven, handsome and had a shifty look. Gobbo's rate of beatings went up from 1.2 a week to 1.89. So one day he went to the major Domo's office, when that important man was in a benevolent mood and knocked at the door. "Come in" said the Major Domo. Gobbo came in, and explained his business. "I wish to say Sir, that I think Mr Splendido is not who he seems to be."

"And who", said the Major Domo, "Does he seem to be?"

"Corvo, the burglar", replied Gobbo.

"Ah" said the Major Domo, who had a clear and logical mind, "then you allege, do you, that Mr Splendido is not Corvo?" This confused Gobbo dreadfully, because he tried to say the opposite but it had come out upside down. However he eventually did make the Major Domo understand what he thought. "How will you prove it?"

“I have a plan” replied Gobbo, “I will go up to Mr Splendido when he is asleep and call out Corvo! Very loud, if he says Yes or something like that, it must be him.” So they did that, that very night. And sure enough Mr Splendido sat up and said “Who called me?” But when he saw who were there, Gobbo and the Major Domo, he leapt out of bed and ran for the window. He jumped out and got away before they could catch him. He went straight home and shaved off his eyebrows and plotted the stage of his career of crime.

Meanwhile the Major Domo spoke so well of Gobbo to the Baron, that he was promoted to be Head Scullion, the previous incumbent becoming a Footman, the Head Footman having been selected to succeed the wicked Corvo as Assistant Major Domo. Being Head Scullion gave him the right of beating the junior scullions, but he didn’t beat them nearly as often as he had been when he was one. All except one, a new member of the establishment, called Bruno. Bruno was a tall dark fellow, and would have been called handsome if he had only had eyebrows like other people; and he was very badly behaved. That was why he got beaten so often.

About that time the Baron’s silver began to disappear. This worried Gobbo because as Head Scullion he was responsible for it not disappearing. So he put two and two together as he so often had done before. Late one night he suddenly gave orders that scullion Bruno was to sleep that night in the east dormitory, and not on his usual palliasse. All the scullions were surprised what a fuss Bruno made because the East dormitory was known to be more comfortable than the West one. However, Gobbo went straight to Bruno’s palliasse and felt it and poked it and shook it and there was the missing silver. And a lot of gold plate too, which hadn’t been missed because the Baron only used it for entertaining Royalty which hadn’t happened for ages past.

So next morning Bruno was once more before the Baron, who accuse him of theft, gave all the evidence as usual himself, found him Guilty (and probably Guilty of murdering Mr Mugscuttle as well), and sentenced him to ten years in prison. But on the way

to prison the villain broke free, and hid behind a hedge long enough to shave off all his hair and change his name to Orlando, and when he came out the policeman asked him if he had seen their prisoner go, and he said "Yes, that way." And off they all went and he got away.

Needless to say, the Baron (whose sense of Justice was greater than his regard for Procedure) rewarded Gobbo by promoting him to be sub-steward. In this capacity he it was his duty to perambulate the Estate from time to time and report on any peculiar happenings. So when the Baron's daughter, Lady Lily, was reported missing from the boudoir where they usually kept her, Gobbo was told to make a search. This he did, but found nothing that looked at all like Lady Lily. He noticed one or two things that caught his attention, however. One was a scarecrow, and it him only a few minutes to identify that; the other was definitely a human being, skulking on the outskirts of a wood, but he could easily tell it was not Lady Lily because it was a man, and a bald man at that. A Poacher, thought Gobbo, who had read descriptions of them in books; I'll follow him and see what he does. He took the greatest care not to make a sound, and even when he tripped over branches or fell into ditches he did it as quietly as he could, and in this way was able to follow the Poacher (if such it proved to be) to a ruined tower by the circuit wall. High above here was an ivied window, but no door could Gobbo see. He lost sight of the Poacher, and walked all round the tower without finding a way in. "Ha" he thought "There must be a ladder." And sure enough he found one. He picked up one end of it, and was dismayed to observe the Poacher picking up the other end. However, he had his wits about him, and said cheerily "Many hands make light work, they do say." The Poacher couldn't think of a suitable answer, so he said "Help me carry it to the tower."

"Okay" said Gobbo. They got it to the tower, and leant it up against the window. "thanks" said the Poacher and climbed up. Then Gobbo took away the ladder and wondered what to do next. Just then he herd a scream, such as he had often heard before. It was but the work of a couple of minutes to recall where; the Lady Lily

screams just like that, he thought. He ran all the way to the Baron's Castle, and called out a posse of servants, who came with guns and sticks and whistles and bits of string and surrounded the tower. Up went Gobbo with revolver and when he got to the window he said "hands up!" Corvo, for it was he in all but name (which was now Orlando, as I said) immediately put up his hands, and therewith inevitably dropped Lily on the floor. The floor being rotten she fell through and fell right down the tower and was picked up screaming by some female servants brought for the purpose. Meanwhile Corvo was bound and gagged and brought before the Baron once again.

This time the Baron was really angry. He not only prosecuted and gave evidence on both sides and found the verdict and pronounced sentence, but executed the sentence himself by taking Corvo in person to a very strong prison on an island. This time he never escaped. But Gobbo, who could be promoted no further without getting rid of the Major Domo or the Assistant Major Domo, was offered the lady Lily as his wife. Luckily however he had a girlfriend of his own, so was able to decline without hurting the Baron's feelings. He set up after that as a private detective, and made a very good living at it. Eventually he became Chief Royal Detective and was made a Baron himself. Which shows that Heroes always get the better of Villains in the end.